



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

No. CCCXIV.

JANUARY, 1883.

THE REVISION OF CREEDS.

PART I.

REV. DR. SMYTH.

RESTATEMENT of creeds has always been only a question of time. From the beginning the church has always at least held its creeds subject to renewals and adaptations to the times. In the ante-Nicene period several formulas of faith appeared. The so-called Apostles' Creed was a gradual growth. An ancient baptismal formula was expanded into the Nicene Creed, and a century had not passed before that first ecumenical symbol was in turn enlarged. Its closing anathema disappeared from later reaffirmations of it. The solemn decree of the fathers at Ephesus did not protect it from additions by the Council of Chalcedon, nor did their prohibition of any new creed prevent their own from receiving further definition by a still later council. This most unchangeable of creeds, as it still stands in the liturgy of the Church, shows upon more than one of its ancient expressions marks of time and change. Rome has repeatedly restated or defined its infallible teachings. The Protestant Confessions disclose the same tendency, and in still greater force, toward multiplication and periodic renewals. Confession followed confession in Lutheran and Reformed churches; the first Scotch Confession was followed by the second Scotch Confession; the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England were buttressed in twenty-

VOL. CXXXVI.—NO. 314.

1

four years by the Lambeth articles. Neither Episcopacy nor Presbyterianism altogether escaped change in passing to America.

A brief glance at the history of creeds is sufficient to indicate the working of some law of growth, and, to some extent, of revision, in Christian theology, and to justify the inference that further statements and restatements of faith must follow in their own time. The significant fact should not be overlooked, that this process of renewal and rejuvenescence of creeds is no accidental matter; it is the first law of Christian creeds, for they contain within themselves the principle of their own revision. The Protestant Confessions, in particular, distinctly assume the possibility of their own improvement, for they uniformly subject themselves to the Word of God as their supreme law. Whoever subscribes to these creeds is bound in honor to hold them always in subordination to his study of the Scriptures. He violates, not merely their letter, but their life, if he does not so hold them. This principle of the supremacy of Scripture is a formative principle of Protestant creeds, and it involves in it the admission, and at times the obligation, of their revision. Consequently, honesty in subscription may require more than a stalwart adherence to their terms; it may sometimes lay upon such as are able to bear it, the duty of criticism, and the burden of restating their truths; as fidelity to a trust may sometimes require careful reinvestment of funds, while refusal or negligence to save a property by timely reinvestment might satisfy the letter, and break the intention, of a deed. It needs to be insisted that loyalty to the real mission of historic creeds, as well as obedience to their higher law of the Scriptures, which is acknowledged in the very act of subscription, may bring to honest men the duty of their preservation by their revision.

The practical question, then, is not whether creeds may be reinvested in better forms of statement by theologians who hold them in trust, but whether the work of revision is timely; whether, in any particular age, the time is fully come, and the necessity apparent, for a fresh readaptation of Christian doctrine to the thoughts and lives of men. Does this work lie now before the door of the Protestant Church?

Certain general principles of the formation of creeds should be considered before we can gain a broad judgment concerning the present timeliness of their revision. Creeds are growths; they follow laws of development. No great creed can be made;

it must be born. Any confession of faith which has vitality enough to live in the thoughts of men, is a birth of the spirit of an age; not the manufacture of a convocation of ecclesiastics. Living creeds are never made to order; they come forth from the struggles and throes of thought; they are born of the truest and best life of an age. Those solid stratifications of belief, the historic creeds of the Church, were not upheaved by theological catastrophes;—intense fires may have burned beneath them; forces which had been gathering strength for years may have broken out with apparent suddenness upon the surface, and in some one great soul the new era may have begun; but the law of progress in the moral world, as in the natural, is a law of growth and age-long development. We can trace a process of development of doctrine in the New Testament itself. The epochs of Christian history have proved no exceptions to this law of all progress. Thus the roots of the Reformation run far back, and deep down, into the richest Christian life and the most fertile thought of the preceding era. We may depend upon it, then, that we cannot manufacture by ecclesiastical contrivance, or produce by theological forcing, a creed that will live and be a power among men; the only question is whether, by the grace of God, any new creed for the Church is coming to the birth in these days; and if providence is about to send into the churches a creed, born anew of the spirit of truth, which shall inherit the past, and also be the heir of modern knowledge, and prove equal to present responsibilities of thought, then, surely, the Church of the living God should be ready to receive it, and to ordain it with its authority for the work to which it shall be called of God.

Our limits will permit only the brief mention of signs of the times which may betoken the opportunity for a revised creed.

First. An important and well-established development of philosophy and science may bring a new crisis to creeds. The ancient and solid masonry of systems once held impregnable, may not answer at all the necessities of modern warfare. Christian faith may be called to meet the alternative of marching out from some ecclesiastical fortifications, or else being buried beneath their ruins. Thus, at the Reformation, faith abandoned the protection of sacerdotalism, and defended itself with the sword of the Spirit in the open field of the new learning. There is, and must always be going on, a process of adaptation, or correlation, between the environment of thought in an age and the vitality

of its faith. Creeds must be subject to a certain process of acclimatization; and that, not because they are dead, but because they are things of life. A dead creed may need watchers, but not physicians. It may require eulogies and epitaphs, but not reclothing and improvement. The fears of some should be relieved by the reflection that revision is a vitalizing process, not a work of destruction.

Second. Some continued and pronounced movement of religious life may renew the creed of a church. Some fresh influx of spiritual power, as in Wesleyanism, may overflow traditional forms of belief, and require larger statement of belief. The Spirit of God through the revived life of the people may compel the theology of the schools to cast off its worthless branches, and to put forth fresh leaves in their season. Or before some gigantic form of error belief may be forced to divest itself of encumbrances, to choose again perhaps the simpler shepherd's sling, and to leave unused the carefully jointed arguments and iron-clad logic in which great defenders of the faith have thought themselves invincible, in order that it may overcome with its simpler faith the proud unbelief of the hour.

These two factors, the inward growth of faith, and the stimulus of some new form of error, may work together in producing greater works of faith. Thus the creed of Nicæa was the result of these concurrent forces, a growing appreciation in the thought of the Church of the essential deity of Christ, and the threatening Arian heresy. So in the Reformation, under the powerful excitement of the danger from Papal indulgences, the truth of justification by faith, which had been long latent in the heart of pietism, came to the light in Luther's theses, and ripened in the Augsburg Confession.

Third. Any deep-seated popular distrust of the belief supposed to be held in the churches, or a growing separation between the common Christian sense of Christian people and the standards of a denomination, may prove a providential necessity for restatement, and, possibly, simplification of the doctrines of faith. A plain man, accustomed to judge things by their appearance, may be at a loss to understand the liberties which theologians seem to take with ancient creeds. The trained theologian possesses the historic sense, is familiar with the controversies in which words have received their technical stamp, perceives at a

glance the self-limitations of creeds, can follow down into present issues the trend and true purpose of the successive confessions of the Church; and he therefore may be able with honorable intention to subscribe to forms of words which to the plain man seem to bristle and strive against any attempt to force them into conformity with present ways of speech. The churches seem to him, in their seminaries and their pulpits, to put in honor standards under which believers are not marching in their real conflict in the world; and a suspicion of theological casuistry, if not of Jesuitical evasion, falls upon the ministry who are required to profess conformity to such standards. This distrust may spring partly from an impracticable idea of creed-subscription. An elaborate theological or denominational creed is not, as sometimes seems to be supposed, a contract to be signed and kept to the letter; it is a platform for organization and united action. Plain men do not understand, when they assent to a political platform by the most positive subscription of a vote, that they are thereby bound in honor to believe in every identical word of it, and to give up altogether the right of criticising their party and even of differing from it upon particular points of its faith. Whatever crudeness and misconceptions, however, there may be in the popular idea of subscription to creeds,—a misunderstanding, be it observed, often fed by theological partisans in their anxiety to bind others to their particular construction of orthodoxy,—certainly the existence of a widespread uneasiness and distrust in the popular mind upon this subject must be regarded as an evil, and an evil, too, which the governing powers of a church can ignore only at the cost of their own influence among the people. It will not do if the theologians are satisfied with their “rights in ancient creeds,” and the people are not. There is a sound apostolic principle which possibly may have application in some churches to their creeds as well as to their charities, that the strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. Even conservators of orthodoxy might find in the application of this higher law of love to some creeds a reason for their simplification, although they may be satisfied with the Westminster Confession, and in consenting to its revision do not please themselves. “The Church,” we may need frequently to be reminded, “was not made for theology, but theology was made for the church.” I do not mean that we should be ready to trim our creeds to the fashion of the hour; a good creed like a strong

oak, does not bend to the passing breeze. The great problems of theology are not to be resettled by the newspapers. But I do mean that one of the providential signs of new work for the guardians of the faith to bestir themselves about, is the prevalence among the people, and in some churches, of a feeling that the theology of the creeds and the theology of the pulpit, the philosophy of the confessions and the working philosophy of the church, do not correspond. Among the laity of some churches, as the Presbyterian, this conviction prevails more generally than seems to be recognized among the clergy. I remarked that our theology cannot be remade for us in the newspapers; but the columns of the secular press may be good witnesses to the popular sense of need that our theologies should bring their standards up to the questions of the times.

Those, however, who are most keenly alive to this state of things among the people, may not be clear that the hour has struck for active effort in this direction. Some have deemed it wisest to spend their energy in helping their particular churches out and up to higher and broader views of revelation. They recognize the immense amount of preliminary work to be done before revision of a time-honored confession, like the Westminster, can be brought about quietly and beneficently; they wish for reformation rather than revolution; they wait for the fears and oppositions of good men to subside. They concern themselves mostly with the work of the real improvement of theology, leaving the ecclesiastical ratification of it to follow in due time. Such men must expect to be exposed to a double misunderstanding; on the one hand they will be regarded as bringers in of divisions, brethren whose own sense of honor should lead them to take themselves out of the communions in which they too were born, and which to them also are a sacred heritage from the fathers. On the other hand, they will be suspected of not knowing their own "drift," or of concealing their real opinions, and neighborly hands will be stretched out to them, and they will be claimed by bodies with whom they would observe only that general fellowship which all who are called Christian should be careful to maintain toward one another. But if their loyalty forbids them voluntarily to forsake their own birthright for other folds, their honor, also, will not permit them to be read out of their own churches; they will stay upon their own ancestral ground and finish upon it whatever work for the renewal of the

received theology may be given them to do. In this determination they will be strengthened by the reflection that they follow the highest example: for Jesus of Nazareth did not find himself constrained in honor to depart from the synagogue while he was training his disciples to build up his church, and he conformed to the customs of the Temple whose law he knew was to be fulfilled in his Gospel. The greatest of the Apostles was loyal to the Old Testament even while writing the epistles of Christian liberty for the New; and he would not be forced into the leadership of a party at Corinth, but was anxious to return to Jerusalem at Pentecost. He was making the first great revision of the creed of Christendom even while he could in good conscience take upon himself a Jewish vow. Those, therefore, who are consciously and really working for theological reform may stay where they are, and refer their inquisitors to the chief of the Apostles, and even to the great Example. It is never dishonest, it is always Christian, to seek to find the fulfillment of the old truth in the new knowledge. Such is true Apostolic conservatism.

The specific question is now in order, how far are these principles and conditions met in any present demand for revision or restatement of creeds? I have room to mention only the more important tendencies of our times, which are bringing this work to the attention of our churches.

No intelligent observer can deny that a powerful movement in theology has reached our shores. Many, however, mistake mere incidental turns, or momentary effects of it, for the sweep of the current, or the character of the whole movement. This "new theology,"—as it is called by those who do not realize how largely it is a return to a theology older than our Latin creeds,—may be generally described by the following characteristics.

(1) It is ethical rather than legal. Luther went back for his theology to the Bible, and Augustine, and Tauler. Calvin went back for his theology to the Bible, and Augustine, and the Roman law. The new theology goes back to the Bible and the Christian consciousness for its authority and its light; to the Bible with a more scientific principle of interpretation than Calvin could gain from Augustine, and to Christian consciousness with a more historical method than Luther could gain from the mysticism of the "German Theology." The "new theology" recognizes the fact that a chilling rationalism, or an unhealthy

pietism, has been the nemesis of much that was one-sided and imperfect in the theological revival which came to a pause in the seventeenth century. The present theological renaissance seeks to take up again and to carry forward to larger fulfillment the theology of the Reformation, which has been arrested in legalism and confessionalism. It will work out in their unity, on the field of modern criticism, Luther's two principles of the Reformation — the Bible and faith. It will think his mysticism out into a spiritual philosophy of the validity of faith. It will put Calvin's Institutes into a more comprehensive philosophy of history, and take his Latin principle of sovereignty up into a glowing Christian conception of the supremacy of love. The "new theology" is the oldest theology: it has its origin not in Holland, nor in the pulpit of Dr. Emmons; but it follows the ways of the Spirit through history, listening to all the prophets, and sitting at the feet of all true scholars, growing more simple and child-like of spirit as it learns from many masters, and comes through many lands, to open the Scriptures afresh for our wants, and to keep our faith untouched by the evil of our world.

The new ethical theology goes back, behind the principles of the Roman law, and the deductions of legalism, to primary and essential relations of moral persons for its analogies and the alphabet of its reasonings concerning God and his relations, historical and governmental, to man. It claims to fulfill the lower theologies in its ethical and spiritual comprehension.

(2) The method of this ethical theology is characteristic. Its style is Gothic rather than classic. It can be pointed and definitive; it can run clear lines high up; but it is impatient of rounded and closed systems; it leads up along all its lines to the thought of something greater than can be inclosed in circles of logical definition, and it is always suggestive of the infinite. Its method is to look abroad, and endeavor to see things as they are—the near object in its distinctness, and the truth left by revelation on the far horizons of knowledge in its indistinctness. It seeks for clear ideas, and among the first of these some clear idea of our own ignorance and the limits of revelation.

(3) It is distinguished by its inductive study of the Scriptures. This is its most generally accepted characteristic. The new epoch is marked by the advent of biblical theology. Its scientific method of discovering the meaning of different Scriptures will put away forever scholastic circumventions, verbal artifices, and systematic casuistries, in the study of God's word.

Another tendency of significance in this connection is the present movement from all sides toward Christian unity. Protestantism has apparently turned the goal of its age of separations, and is already moving on toward catholicity. The age of individualism was first necessary in Christian history; and it has had its day in Puritanism and the atomic Calvinism of New England theology. The truth of the individual right and responsibility before God has done its work—a great work—both for the church and the nation; its fruit shall remain in the coming age of rounder biblical faith and Christian catholicity. He who does not discern the undercurrent of life which is carrying all sects out toward one broad communion—who does not heed the demands upon the best thought and devotion which this movement brings with it to every living church—who would strengthen the barriers of sectarianism or provincial theologies against it—he must be blind to one of the most glorious providences of our generation, and dull of hearing to one of the clearest calls to go forward which has come in any century to the people of God.

One more fact of the times must be gathered into the conclusion of this matter. The error of our day is not any of the heresies against which the historic creeds were built up. Faith finds now its antagonism, not in denial of some particular doctrine of grace, nor in some faulty theory of some essential truth; but rather in the twofold opposition of materialism in science and materialism in life. Obviously the creeds erected to protect the church from this last and comprehensive denial must be different constructions from those which faced Unitarianism, or were made strong on the side opposing deism. Creeds, if they are to be worth anything for defensive warfare, must be made to face present issues, and be brought within range of modern denials. The paramount question now does not lie between different interpretations of Christianity in as many different sects; it is, whether there is any divine revelation, whether we have any religion at all. It is one of the services which science has rendered religion that its progress has compelled believers to go up higher, and to come out from their traditional controversies, to stand together and confidently upon the first principles of their faith.

Of one large and influential denomination, the Presbyterian—whose tolerance I have never had occasion to question—the call for revision would seem, at least, to require some plain,

official declaration of what is not now involved in subscription to their historic theology.

It has been the boast of Congregationalists that for them the Word of God is not bound. Their councils have repeatedly reaffirmed the principles of evangelical liberty. Of their leading seminaries, one is bound to orthodoxy by the loyal spirit of its custodians and faculty, more than by any form of subscription; and the other, in the judgment of those most responsible for its management, is not fettered to any past or passing form of orthodoxy. A commission, moreover, is now at work in formulating a new creed, not as another bond, but as a better confession of the faith commonly held in their churches. To the Congregationalists the demand comes, then, not for ecclesiastical liberation, but for honest, hopeful work in furthering Biblical studies and in meeting the thoughts of men's hearts by more spiritual teaching and preaching, emptied of the dregs and bitterness of past controversies, and full of the Spirit of Christ.

One practical question should be touched upon in conclusion. Two ways of revision of creeds seem possible. The one would be the short way of return to the Apostles' Creed. This solution of the question would be in harmony with one of the main tendencies of the new theology, which, as we have seen, has already worked its way back, around and behind the rugged Latin theology, to find a broad place and fresh life in the faith of primitive Christianity. Possibly the so-called Apostles' Creed might prove that "large thing in the midst of all the churches," which shall be the comprehensive formula for Christianity. But the theological renaissance in our age is more than a revival of ante-Nicene theology. Another way of meeting these providential demands upon Christian belief may be possible: not so easy a way, nor so short, yet one promising in the end larger results. That course, and to us it seems the more excellent way, is for each church to strive to work its own inherited creeds out from scholastic confessionalism into catholicity; for every honest scholar, in every church in earnest enough with truth to leave room for honest thought, to revise its beliefs in his own mind, seeking studiously to conserve in his growing thought and knowledge whatever truth he may find at the root of his own early training, whatever word of the Spirit has been the vitality of any dogma which now may seem to him overgrown with error. In this method of working, which is both loyal, honest, and brave, we

may hope to grow into a rich simplicity of faith which shall possess the child-like spirit of the early Apostles' Creed, together with the wisdom of the ripe age of the Church.

NEWMAN SMYTH.

REV. DR. ABBOTT.

IN theological science, as in all other sciences, a clear distinction exists, though it is not always recognized, between facts and theories, between phenomena and the explanations afforded of the phenomena. Thus, for example, there is no question in any mind that great varieties are observable in the forms of animal life—great varieties, that is, of species. This is an unquestionable fact. The disputes which have taken place in the scientific world relate to the question how this fact is to be accounted for; in other words, what is the origin of these varieties of species. The great facts of the religious life are as absolutely certain, as entirely unquestionable, as the facts of material science. It is true that a larger and broader experience accompanying the development of the race renders more various and more complex the facts of the religious life. But it is equally true that a more patient and painstaking observation, a more careful study of the forms of life of the past, and a wider generalization and more careful classification, have also brought, either actually to our knowledge or to our wise comprehension, a much larger range of facts in material science than was formerly recognized. But in both domains the facts are not matters of dispute. In the religious life, as in every phase of life, belief in the facts remains substantially unchanged from generation to generation. There is no material change of opinion respecting them. The belief of man in them is as certain as it ever was, and is much clearer and more intelligent. The changes which have taken place in theology are of two kinds: they are either changes in the form of expression of the facts of the religious life, or they are changes of opinion respecting the proper philosophical explanation of those experiences.

Our church creeds are, for the most part, statements not of religious facts, but of religious theories; and our theological controversies are almost entirely about, not the facts, but the theories. To illustrate: there is no doubt, in any thoughtful mind, respecting the fact of sin and its universality. The expression,

in the prayer of confession, in the Episcopal Prayer-Book, utters the universal experience of all spiritually-minded men: "We have done the things we ought not to have done, and we have left undone the things that we ought to have done, and there is no health in us." The existence of this fact is recognized practically in every family, in the administration of parental government; in every community, by the institution of police systems, the erection of prisons, and the establishment of punitive systems; in every religion, in the language of confession and the petition for pardon; and in every individual soul, in its own consciousness of shame, disgrace, or remorse, in the view of its own sins and shortcomings. This is the fact; belief in this fact is both broader and profounder than it ever was before, and it will grow broader and profounder as the race progresses in moral and spiritual development.

How are we to account for this fact; how reconcile it with the all but universal belief that the world is the product of, and subject to, a wise and beneficent Divine Ruler? To this question two antagonistic systems of philosophy make two antagonistic answers. The traditional philosophy of the Church replies, "God made man perfect. The first man fell into sin, and all his descendants have inherited from him sinful proclivities." The modern philosophy of evolution replies, "God is gradually developing higher forms of life out of lower forms; the intellectual and the spiritual out of the animal and the sensuous, and it is in this process of gradual development that the supremacy of the lower over the higher, *i.e.*, sin, shows itself."

To illustrate again: the fact of the forgiveness of sins is unquestionable. That there is an experience of succor from remorse, and of peace in a sense of pardon, is not doubted by any one who has given any thoughtful consideration to the history of humanity. This is the fact which the oldest of our church symbols, the Apostles' Creed, represents by the declaration: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." How this forgiveness of sins is brought about, how this peace is afforded, how the soul that has separated from God, and from all that is good, and pure, and holy, by its lapse into selfishness, animalism, sensuality, is brought into fellowship with God; in other words, what is the nature and operation of the atonement, is a question upon which conflicting schools of theology have contended from the earliest ages, and will probably go on contending to the end. Again:

that there is a Divine Spirit, that he influences the spirits of men, that he comforts us in our trouble, strengthens us in our weakness, helps us in our temptations, and guides us in our perplexity, redeeming and uplifting men, and changing, by his beatific influence, the whole course and current of their lives, is as certain as any fact of history. What this mystic influence is, how it is related to the Divine Father of us all, whether we are to call it an influence, or a person, what explanation, in other words, we are to give of this phenomenon, by what theory we are to account for it,—these are questions on which philosophers and theologians have disputed from the beginning, and probably will continue to dispute to the end.

When the question is asked whether the opinions of men do not differ widely from the creeds they profess to hold, the true answer must take account of this very simple distinction between fact and theory. In so far as these creeds embody a statement of the facts of religious experience, there has been no departure from them; there has only been a deepening conviction of their truth. But from the philosophic explanations of those facts, afforded by the creeds of the sixteenth century, there is going on a rapid departure. Old methods of explaining the facts of sin, and pardon, and divine inspiring and redeeming influences, are not satisfactory to men who endeavor to bring them into harmony with modern thought and modern knowledge. Some religious teachers, following, unconsciously, the lead of Pope Pius IX., declare emphatically that it is a heresy to attempt to bring theology into harmony with modern thought. Some are content to hold both the modern theories of science and the ancient theories of religion, incongruous though they may be, without attempting to reconcile them. Some endeavor to frame new theories of religion to conform to the better knowledge and new scientific theories of our own times. Some are content to hold fast to the great facts of the religious life as witnessed in human consciousness and testified to by wide observation, and leave the scientific explanation of them to the future. These four classes represent the four classes of theological thinkers of to-day. The progress of the Church is from the first two toward the latter two.

This analysis, if it be correct, answers the question whether a restatement of creed is desirable, and if so, what kind of restatement should be made?

Three methods of reconstruction are possible. *First.* We may undertake to construct a new science of religion, to find, that is, new philosophical explanations for the great facts of religious experience. The time has not yet come for this; I doubt if it ever will come. Individuals may write theologies; the Church never should have undertaken to write a theology, and probably never will undertake it again. There is no more reason why the theologians should come together in a great assembly and combine in a common explanation of the philosophy of religious phenomena, than why the scientific teachers should meet in convention and oracularly declare what are the true explanations of physical phenomena.

Second. We may restate the facts of religious life, with brief, comprehensive, and generic explanation of their causes. We may thus, perhaps with profit, disintrall ourselves from the intellectual bondage which the traditions of the past impose upon us. The Congregationalists have recently appointed a Commission to restate Congregational faith; and if they are to succeed at all in this somewhat difficult task, it is in this direction they must look for success. But any restatement of the theories of religion, however simple it may be, can hardly prove more than temporary; and its chief value will be in a breaking loose from old theories rather than in a formulation of new ones, and, perhaps, still more, in the reaffirmation involved of those great facts of spiritual consciousness which give the chief, if not the sole, value to all creeds.

Third. Or, finally, we may abandon all attempt to make dogmatic and authoritative statements of the explanation of religious experience, and content ourselves with simply affirming the great facts of the religious life: sin, redemption, God, immortality, and judgment. Man is not only an immature and imperfect being yet to be developed into the blossom and fruit; he is sinful and guilty, knowingly doing and being that which is wrong, and requiring, before he is fitted for relationship with the pure and the holy, a radical transformation of character. The burden of the past and the fear of the future which sin involves can be, and is, lifted off from the human heart by the assurance of divine forgiveness hinted at in nature, more clearly declared in Scripture, and receiving its supreme attestation in the consciousness of peace and pardon experienced by the soul. There is a power out of ourselves which makes for righteousness; we cannot lift

ourselves out of our own condition, undo our own undoing, nor make ourselves worthy to be called sons of God. This comes of a higher and a divine influence wrought on us and in us by the invisible spirit and presence of God. There is a truth and a beauty in goodness and love; there is a falseness and a deformity in selfishness and hate. The life lived for one's self is a mean life; the life of self-denial for others' sake is a noble and a divine life. As there is a God above us, and about us, and within us, a God best interpreted to our imagination by the words "Our Father," best brought within the horizon of our vision by the incomparable life and character of Jesus of Nazareth, best brought to our consciousness by the indwelling presence of his Spirit in the heart, so there is a future before us for which it is worth every man's while to live—a future that holds out to us possibilities of spiritual ruin, the more awful that they are undefined, and possibilities of spiritual life, the more inspiring that they transcend definition, or even our most ecstatic imagination.

Of course, I do not attempt in a paragraph to embody a Christian creed; I only attempt to illustrate what I mean by the great facts of Christian consciousness, universally believed in all ages and in all branches of the Christian Church, in contrast with those theological theories which have been, in all ages and all Church organizations, so fruitful a theme of fruitless controversies.

Any new statement of theological doctrine at this time will be more likely to provoke controversy than to allay it. A statement of Christian faith might be made, in the fullness of time will, perhaps, be made, which would ignore intellectual divisions and emphasize spiritual agreement. Such a statement would leave religious teachers to differ in their religious philosophies and would be valuable because it would show their essential agreement as witnesses to the great religious facts. This was the method of the New Testament writers. They abound in testimony, they are chary of philosophy. They express their convictions, not their opinions. Of this method, the Apostles' Creed is the most conspicuous and illustrious example in ecclesiastical history. This is the method to which, in time, though it may be yet a long time, the Church of Christ will eventually return.

In all this discussion Christian men ought not to forget that

the chief object of the Church of Christ is not to propound, develop, or defend theology, but to make men. That "the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works" is declared by Scripture itself to be the final object of Scripture. That we may all come unto the stature of a perfect manhood in Christ Jesus, is declared by the chiefest apostle to be the final object of the work of all apostles and teachers in the Church of Christ. There is always a danger when the energy of Christians is diverted from spiritual work to intellectual pastime. The business of preachers is not to afford new definitions of sin, or new explanations of its existence, but to develop in men's consciousness a profounder sense of their own guilt and need; not to afford a new psychology of Christ, or a new explanation of his transcendent character, but to inspire in men a deeper reverence and a warmer affection for him; not to perfect a more satisfactory explanation of the methods by which God and the human soul are brought into spiritual harmony with one another, but to bring the souls of men out of their wretchedness, their falseness, and their unspirituality, into the warmth and the light of the love and the fellowship of God.

LYMAN ABBOTT.

REV. MR. BEECHER.

It is not to be denied that in every community where the intellect has been aroused, good men have become dissatisfied with the old and prevalent creeds. That creeds should be rejected by men who have abandoned all faith in revealed religion, or by scientists who have gone into the twilight of agnosticism, can excite no surprise. But, in a different way, and for different reasons, discontent prevails among the most thoughtful men and the most devout. It may be seen in the gradual disuse in the pulpit of venerable symbols of doctrine; in the attempt, by construction, to bring them into sympathy with modern religious ideas,—a signal illustration of putting new patches on old garments, new wine into old bottles,—in the demand in various quarters for an amendment of creeds; in a spasmodic attempt on the part of good but not wise men to bring back neglected creeds to the family, the school, and the church service; which is as if one in November should gather the leaves that have finished their work and attempt

to glue them again to their old places and make them perform again their past and finished functions; and, above all, this discontent with ancient doctrinal formulas is shown by an organized attempt to frame a creed that shall be suitable to the divinely appointed fruit of modern thought.*

This open or latent discontent with creeds does not spring from the decline of religious sensibility, but partly from the existence of other and better instruments for instruction, and partly from a conviction that creeds, as they now exist, are not helps, but positive obstructions in the way of the sacred Scriptures, demanding subtle ingenuity, a waste of time, and often the sacrifice of honesty itself, in explaining and defending them. To one not reared in the charmed circle of metaphysical theology of the mediæval type, it may well seem strange that a revelation from God to teach men their duty should be obliged to help itself by an explanatory creed, and that such creed again should require another creed for its explanation, as if each creed were a lens in a telescope, increasing its power to bring near the remote universe.

It may easily be admitted that in an early and ignorant age, before printing was known, when manuscripts were more precious than rubies, and when the common people, for these reasons, had little or no access to the Old Testament, and before portions of the New Testament were generally circulated, or even written—a brief capitulary of the contents of the Bible might be useful. It was under such conditions that the Apostles' Creed appeared. It is the only creed that ever united all Christendom, and has come down through the ages without rent or waste, voicing the heart of orthodox and heterodox alike, simple, transparent, catholic, sublime. It deserves to be studied by all who would build another creed. It is a brief statement of facts, touching the life, death, and resurrection of the Christ. It has no theories, no deductions of principles, no hint of a system of moral truth. Yet, like a golden cincture, it clasps and binds together the whole world of Christian believers!

Next came the Nicene Creed, slightly stepping away from the simplicity of facts, and beginning to evolve a philosophy of the Divine Nature. Slight as was the variation, it constituted a line

* The Triennial Council of Congregational Churches of America, held in St. Louis, 1880, appointed a Commission to prepare, if possible, a capitulary of doctrine.

of division. It separated men. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed came to its aid, weaving more threads for more intricate patterns; but dissent and division grew with equal speed, and to meet these was set forth that masterpiece of film embroidery, which no Jacquard loom could ever equal in silk or gossamer, the Athanasian Creed,—to read which would make even a metaphysician dizzy. And this amazing help to the understanding of Scripture was imposed upon the faith of mankind as the only alternative of eternal damnation!

When once the Latins took up the religious thinking of the Christian world, creeds were made to include ordinances, church organizations, theories of the sacraments, orders of the priesthood, worship, fact and dogma, correlation of scheme with scheme of deduced principles,—in short, an interpretation of the moral government of God, of the philosophy of the Divine mind, statements of the origin of all moral evil, a history of the past eternity, and a chart of the eternity to come.

In proportion as creeds augmented their volume and reduced supernal themes to crystalline definiteness dissent increased, new statements of doctrine fought with old ones, sects were split off here and there, until the Great Reformation came in. But, when learning revived, and a new impulse was given to thought, and vast changes for the better were effected, it was still believed that men had learned enough of God's nature and of human nature, to construct a perfect system of truth. The fatal march toward disunion continued, and the reformed churches had no omnipotent church authority with which to hide dissension within a vast corporation, or to suffocate it, or to govern it by the roaring bulls of discipline.

The venerable Roman sect was a vast tenement-house; the Protestant Church was an open street—each sect keeping house by itself—and quarreling with its neighbors for not keeping house in the same way. Protestant divisions and quarrels were all out of doors; the Roman Catholics' were all in the tenement-house; but they quarreled all the same, and both Catholic and Protestant stand before the world to show that complicated metaphysical creeds do not draw Christians together, but separate them; that they do not promote union, but dissent; and that the more they reduce moral truths to sharp definition the less possible is it to hold large bodies of active-minded men in unity—and all this results not from the impossi-

bility of framing a creed, but from the conceit of knowledge which God alone possesses.

Credo's are statements of belief. They may express the belief of an individual, or of a school, or of a sect. Every science has a substantial credo. Encyclopedias are voluminous credo's. Bills of rights, constitutions, are at the bottom political credo's. The evanescent "platforms" of political parties are credo's. There can be no well-founded objection to a statement of personal religious belief, nor of the joint beliefs of a brotherhood of men, churches, sects, etc. They may be useful in the instruction of the young—in giving to the community the sum of teaching to be expected in any sect, serving as religious advertisements. Valid objections may exist as to the contents of a credo, as to its scope and pretensions, or the uses to which it is put, but none to an attempt to reduce one's beliefs to a philosophical or systematic statement. Religion, being intrinsically an emotion, a disposition, out of which is to spring conduct, is liable to all the ills which betide mere emotion,—fluctuations, enthusiasms, evaporations, imaginative phantasies. An organized center of facts and principles will tend to equilibrate emotion, to give symmetry and stability both to feeling and to conduct. Catechisms for the instruction of the young, all doctrinal sermons, and all ethical discourse are either overt or implied credo's. The pulpit is a vocal credo. All institutes, or systems of theology, are expanded credo's. Christian churches are organized around a philosophical center, and differ essentially from pagan assemblies, not so much in external worship, as in the fact that they have an intellectual center. If credo's, in the largest sense, were withdrawn from the Church, it would collapse, and become a mere puff-ball of sentiment.

But the historic credo's have, in the main, been children of war and instruments of battle. The heaviest clouds, the heart of the storms, through ages, lie along the line of credo's. Protestants have railed at the Pope for unwarranted pretensions and usurped authority, but Protestants and Catholics are just alike, in that that they have given supreme authority to their ignorance, and have given to it the sanctity and authority of God. By and by *knowledge* will be revealed, credo's will be simpler and will require no terrors to hold men to them. Humility will rectify what pride has well-nigh destroyed. For the most part, old credo's are the tombstones of dead beliefs. When the Church

shall realize how little it knows, or has ever known; how unfit it has been, by reason of its worldliness, its passions, its sordid and worldly ambitions, its strifes and cruel quarrels, to give to the world the revelation of love, there will spring up a living creed — the creed of regenerated human life, which no one can dispute, which no one will wish to dispute. Since there is among good men a strong desire to perfect a creed which shall unite men, it may be well to consider past creeds, and to show that the very genius and method of them and their arbitrary and audacious assumptions of authority in the hands of sectarians have been the reason of failure, and will continue to be so as long as creeds shall be constructed after the manner of primitive and mediæval theologists.

The characteristic of the whole Bible is, that truths of the head are expressed in the language of the heart. Creeds have attempted to express the emotion of the heart in the language of the head. The reduction of an emotion to an idea is not a translation, but a destruction. A flower analyzed is a flower destroyed. Fables, parables, idyls, songs, and psalms, the thunder of prophets against iniquity, the simple narrative, the love-converse of the Saviour, the sad requiem of sorrow are, and are meant to be, powers. To obtain an intellectual equivalent may give another sort of power; but not the original, scriptural, divine, power. A musical score has its uses, but it is not music. That cannot be written in ink. It lives only in the air. A hard metaphysical proposition in a confession of faith, propped up by proof texts drawn from imaginative passages, from lyric descants, or heart throbs, can never represent the Bible whatever else it may represent. Creed-makers have treated the Bible as men do their sheep, shearing the wool to make thread, dyeing the thread for the shuttle, and working the shuttle in the loom to create every fabric that invention can conceive, all the while declaring that these fabrics and patterns all grew on the sheep's back!

The process of missing the spirit and genius of the Bible in creeds is carried on yet further by expressing truth, not in the colloquial and vernacular language that all men everywhere employ, but in words that are sorted and appropriated to religious ideas, as if religion must have a language of its own; consecrated phrases, understood only or chiefly by the initiated. In this way the creed is foreign to the Bible; not of its genius,

or method, or substance, but a poor substitute, of use only to men of peculiar education, perplexing to simple minds, even when in substance it speaks truth; but how much more when the substance of it is borrowed from exploded religions, from barbaric periods, from crude civil governments, from obsolete philosophies, dead but unburied.

But, far beyond these, as it were superficial, faults, the mediæval creeds, Catholic and Protestant alike, have utterly failed to understand the latent philosophy of Sacred Scripture. By emphasis it has been made to appear that intellectual believing was more important than being. Righteousness is the end and aim of both Old and New Testaments. Right-mindedness, right character, and conduct, is the whole meaning of the Bible. How to develop that is the problem of divine Providence. The morality prescribed by Sacred Scripture runs through its pages without a crook or change. Morality is obedience to the laws of our being. Obedience to physical laws is physical morality. Social morality includes our relation and duties to our fellow-men. Civil morality includes our duties to the state and nation. Spiritual morality includes the right ordering of life with reference to the great invisible world, the unseen God, the future companionship of purified and developed souls. Upon this line the Bible is an inspired Book. Its ethical teaching is undoubtedly progressive; but the progress, from its rudiments in patriarchal times to its perfection in Christ, is in one direction; and fundamentally its morality is one. Its word upon all things which injure manhood is clear, consistent from end to end, and has scarcely ever been in dispute, or well can be. Its teaching of the elements demanded for a true manhood—positive, affirmative—is continuous, consistent, ample. It places its ten commandments between man spiritual and man animal, saying, in pointed repetition: "Thou shalt not," "Thou shalt not!" It places its Sermon on the Mount with an affirmative voice, calling man, now somewhat released from the animal, up to the full blossom of manhood, saying, in effect, "Thou shalt!" "Thou shalt!" But, grander than Mount Sinai or the Mount of Benediction, stands Calvary, on which the Son of God manifests the inward disposition of God, and gives a new meaning to that life in man toward which slowly the ages had been traveling. And when the record was finished, the Bible was held forth, neither as an encyclopedia, nor as a revelation of the whole science of

humanity, or of Divinity, but, with clear and clean definition gave its own view of the aim and function of inspiration. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.)

Thus Paul spoke of the book. Looking upon the whole apparition of church work, there pass before him apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. iv. 12, 13.) A well-developed manhood after the ideal of God, as manifested in the Christ, is the end which the Gospel seeks.

But, what is the power by which this education is to be accomplished? A gradual unfolding under physical laws, says one; the influence of society and the duties of citizenship, says another; a divine providence, says another; the Church and its ordinances, says another; the promulgation of truth and sound teaching, say still others. All these theories convey some truth, but not the truth. The distinctive force disclosed in the New Testament is the direct action of the soul of God upon the human soul, and the reflection of it from the human soul to its fellows.

All mediæval creeds, and the whole church economy, spring from material and mechanical notions: God is a remote inventor and manager, standing outside and afar off, approachable only or chiefly through mediators, priests, and ministers, and answering through ordinances. The church answered as a kind of general post-office, men sending their petitions to Heaven through it, and receiving replies through its officers and organized channels.

The Scriptural view of God brings him into intimate relations with every part of the universe. All life is inspired by Him and constantly ministered by Him. He is the invisible effluence, which moves all things according to their nature: "In Him, we live and move and have our being." He is near to every one of us; is the inspiration of every thought that seeks him; is approachable by every soul that would be lifted higher, with

symbols if they aid, without them if one choose. He is the one great fountain of influence, filling human life and the ages with power of development. No mountain, no Mecca, or Jerusalem, no shrine, or cathedral, can inclose or possess Him; no priest has any privilege in Him; no bishop or archbishop stands as a favored courtier before Him distributing his favors. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Isaiah lvii. 15.)

There are two great churches,—the church mechanical and the church spiritual. The one is materialized, has forms, order, regulations like a kingdom; the other is living, lambent, invisible, of no shape, with no creed but holiness, with no ordinances; with the real, personal ministry of the Holy Spirit always present, and the light, the life, and the power of God. The church mechanical has no right of existence except as a servant of the church spiritual, but it has usurped the authority of its superior. It demands obedience of all men; it prescribes their beliefs; it organizes their worship; it determines their merit; it stands at the end of the way with the radiant key of heaven and the flaming key of hell, making the whole world crouch at its golden promises or lurid threatenings. To this earthly and mechanical conception of the church belong all mediæval creeds, which have turned the goodness of God into a dry herbarium, which have left out of account the one chief element of power in religion,—the power of a living soul on a living soul. The only orthodoxy on earth is the beauty of holiness. Above all creeds is the creed of right living. God and the human soul are the only forces that the world knows. All others are derivative, subservient, auxiliary.

These views are struggling for such recognition as they had in the primitive church, before philosophy had obscured them, or ecclesiastical ambition had imprisoned them in the vast machinery of the mediæval church. They will throw light upon the movements made to frame new creeds; upon the spasmodic orthodoxy which is attempting to conserve old creeds; upon the condemnation of men who are full of the Holy Spirit, and whose souls are giving forth the light of holiness, because they will not worship the formulas of the past,—because they listen

more to the voice of God than to the authority of the mechanical church.

All that in the Church to-day is lifting and purifying man and infusing into society the redemptive spirit of Christ, is from the soul power of men illumined by the soul of God ; and the zealous and jealous disciples of the letter,—the sentinels watching the dead creeds, the mechanical defenders of a mechanical creed,—are the chief adversaries which the Gospel meets.

HENRY WARD BEECHER.